

The Connecticut Post  
Op Ed: Connecticut, Ready to Vote in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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No matter what the outcome of this week's primary in Bridgeport, it will be an historic election for the state of Connecticut. Voters in the state's largest city will help usher in a new era of voting: optical scan technology will replace the old lever machines, new random audits of election results will guarantee accuracy, and a specially designed vote-by-phone system will ensure that voters with disabilities are able to vote privately and independently.

Why is Connecticut overhauling its electoral process? It's a question I get asked at every public voting machine demonstration my office conducts – more than 140 so far. The answer is actually pretty simple. The federal Help America Vote Act requires that all voting systems produce a permanent paper record with a manual audit capacity. Connecticut's lever machines do not meet this requirement, and therefore, are no longer suitable for elections in this state.

Enter optical scan technology – safe, simple, and secure. Voters check in at the polling place and receive a paper ballot. They make their selections by filling in the oval next to a candidate's name and then put the ballot through a scanner where the votes are tabulated. The paper ballot then drops into a locked ballot box where it can be used to verify election results.

My office, in collaboration with Registrars of Voters and other election officials, has been preparing the state for this change for well over a year. We have delivered voting equipment to every city and town in Connecticut. My office implemented an aggressive training program and in the past six weeks almost 2,500 election officials and poll workers have received comprehensive training in over 200 sessions held in more than 30 regional training centers across the state.

While other states like California struggle with touch screen voting machines that lack verifiable paper trails, Connecticut has chosen a system with a proven track record. Optical scan voting is the most common form of voting technology in America today, with a majority of counties nationwide voting on optical scan machines. During the 2006 general election, optical scan technology was used in 1,752 counties nationwide and we join our New England neighbors Vermont, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire and Rhode Island in using this technology.

In Connecticut, a number of towns already used optical scan technology. Twenty-five (25) towns successfully used the optical scan machines in the November 2006 elections. In May of this year, 13 more towns held their elections using the new voting machines.

As Connecticut makes the transition to new optical scan voting machines, it is imperative that voters have confidence that their vote will be recorded securely and accurately. This past legislative session, my office pushed hard for and succeeded in the passage of Public Act 07-194, An Act Concerning the Integrity and Security of the Voting Process. This law requires Connecticut to conduct random audits of 10% of all polling districts. This means that ballots will be hand counted and compared with machine totals.

Voters with disabilities will also find it easier to vote this fall. The Attorney General, in concurrence with my earlier decision, has ruled that all polling places must ensure that voters with disabilities can vote independently and privately. My office has provided every precinct a specially designed vote-by-phone system that anyone – including those who are visually impaired – can use to vote. Instructional videos have also been sent to every polling place so voters can be informed of their options as they check-in.

To be sure, change is never easy. Still, the new safeguard to voters that comes with a paper trail - and the confidence voters can now have that their votes are counted properly – are vital improvements to our democratic process. It is my hope you will embrace this new era in Connecticut and vote on September 11<sup>th</sup>.